

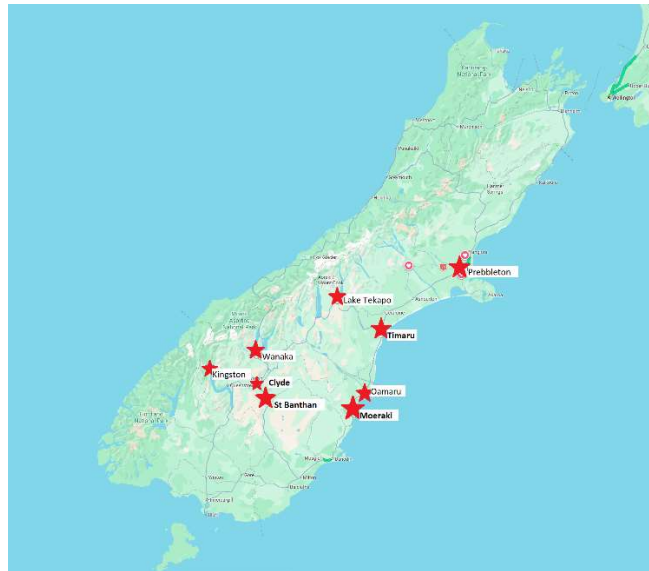
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BR Brake Van World Tour 17

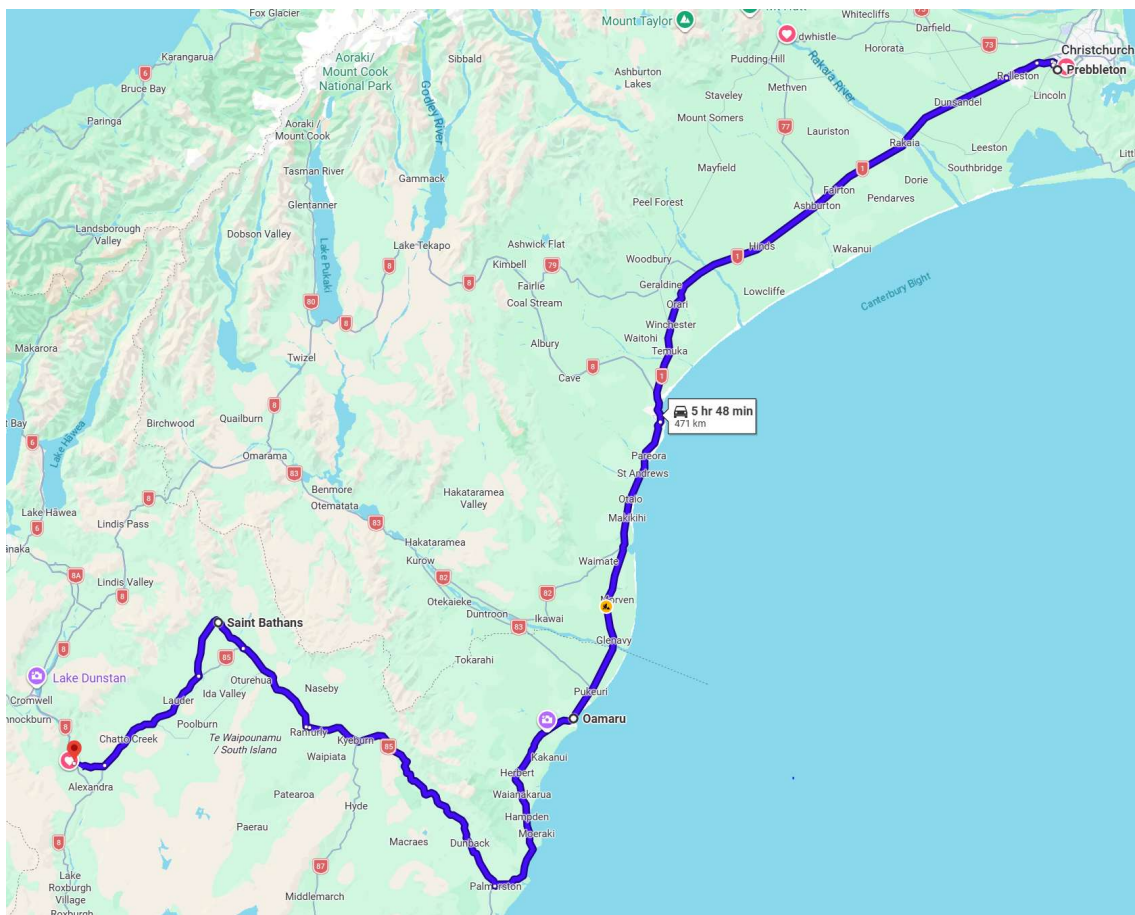
South Island Tour NZ 2026

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Our trip around the South Island of New Zealand over Easter 2026 started with a six-hour drive.

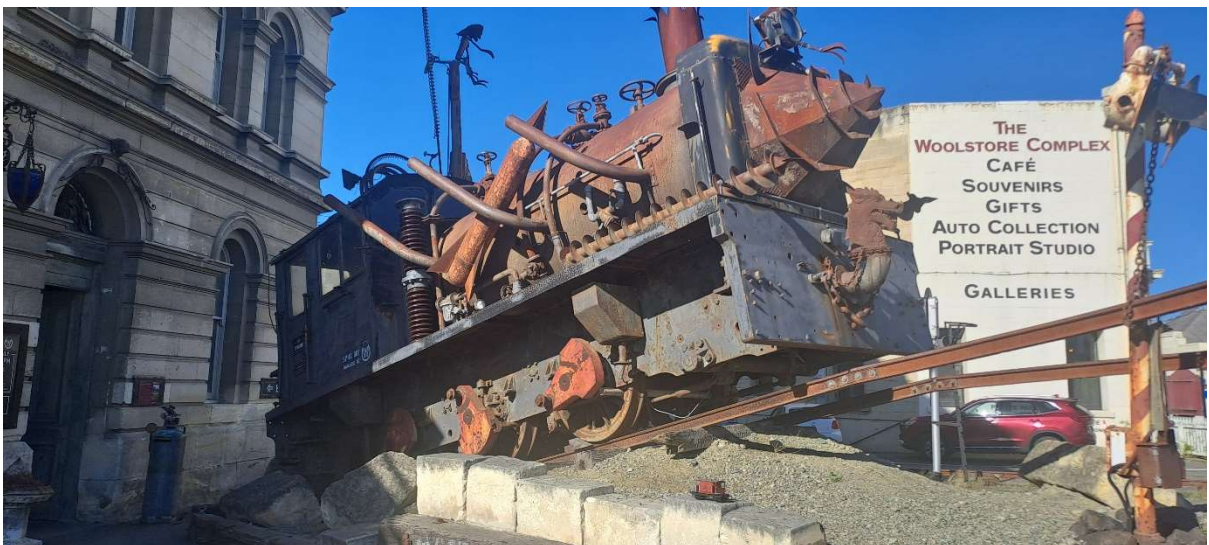


We live in Prebbleton near Christchurch, and we stayed in Clyde. On the way, we visited Oamaru, the Moeraki Boulders, and St Bathans.



First stop for morning tea was Oamaru, a town on the coast about two hours from our start. One area of Oamaru is famous for its Steampunk themes. A whole area of the old town is devoted to this theme, with an annual Steampunk festival and an official Steampunk HQ

Here we see Brake with the Steampunk steam engine, outside Steampunk HQ, which is a museum and workshop situated in the historic Victorian precinct of Oamaru.



Right next to Steampunk HQ is a small heritage railway station, the rail line runs from the Victorian precinct down to the dock area. The day we were visiting a Husky diesel was running, Huskies are a class of 15 diesel mechanical locomotives built in the late 1950s to early 1960s by Robert Stephenson & Hawthorns Ltd. Most served industrial lines in the UK, the one in Oamaru is the only one exported to New Zealand, being RS&H # 7908, built in Darlington for the Wellington Meat Export Company in 1962.

Here Husky 7908 is pulling some A-Class Carriages as it crosses the rail crossing next to steam punk central.



An hour's drive later, we quickly stopped off at Moeraki and the famous Moeraki Boulders. The main road is close to the sea, so it was a quick pit stop to go down to the beach to view the boulders.

The Moeraki Boulders are large, spherical calcite concretions scattered along Koekohe Beach near Moeraki. Formed roughly 65 million years ago, these natural wonders were created by the cementing of mud, silt and clay, later exposed by erosion. The boulders are scattered along the beach for several hundred metres.





On leaving Moeraki, we headed inland, driving through an amazing landscape of rivers and rolling hills which is great driving country, and we had wonderful weather. We had a two-hour drive to a very small settlement called St Bathans.



St Bathans, formerly named Dunstan Creek, is a former gold and coal mining town in the hills of the Central Otago region. The settlement was a centre for the Otago gold rush of the 1860s, but mining has long since ceased. It is now a quiet village centred around the preservation of many of its historic buildings.

The settlement was named for the Scottish Borders village of Abbey St Bathans by early surveyor John Turnbull Thomson; the Scottish village was the birthplace of Thomson's maternal grandfather. It is 40 kilometres northwest of Ranfurly and 60 kilometres northeast of Alexandra, near the Dunstan Creek, beneath the St Bathans' Range and Dunstan mountains.

In St Bathans, the main building is the Vulcan Hotel. The Vulcan Hotel is a restored public house located on the main street of St Bathans. The building was originally constructed in 1882 of mud brick. It is registered as a Category I historic place by Heritage New Zealand. The building is notable as possibly the country's most famous haunted building. Room 1 of the hotel is reputedly home to the spirit of a young woman, thought by some to be a prostitute known as "the Rose", who was strangled to death in the hotel in the 1880s.

Here, Brake took a well-earned break and spent time taking refreshments in the Autumn sun, with the Vulcan pub serving a good range of local beverages and a huge menu of hot food.



St Bathans is well known for Blue Lake, a small man-made lake created by gold-sluicing that transformed the 120-metre high Kildare Hill into a 168-metre deep pit. After mining stopped in 1934, the hole accumulated water, which turned a distinctive blue hue due to minerals from the surrounding rocks.

Brake taking in the view of the Blue Lake from atop the cliffs that surround the area.



A short drive down out of the hills lies the small settlement of Ophir, here an historic post office still exists. Ophir was originally known as Blacks, when gold was discovered in Central Otago in 1861. Ophir's population grew to over 1,000 as it became the commercial and social centre of the district. It was renamed Ophir at this time, after the place name of the legendary "King Solomon's Goldmines", where King Solomon obtained the gold to sheath the Temple in Jerusalem.

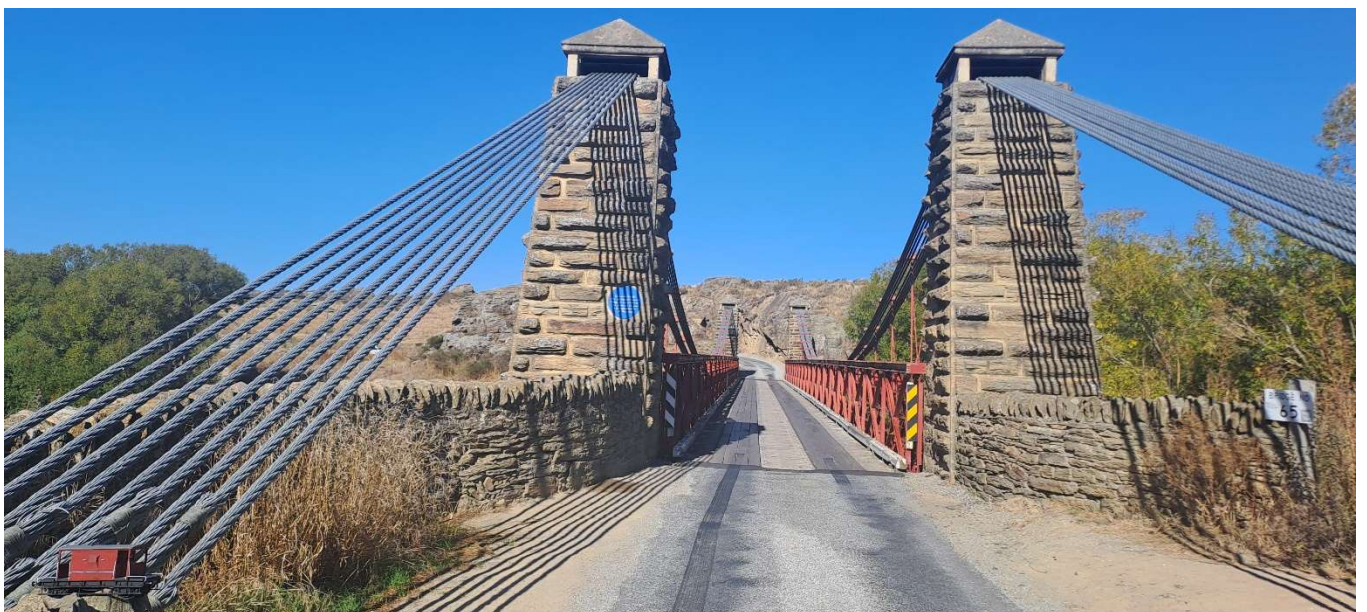
Ophir Post and Telegraph Office, built in 1886 on the main street is a small, but significant legacy from the town's gold mining days, that continues to operate as a post office today. The Ophir Post and Telegraph Office was designed by the Public Works Department for the Post and Telegraph Department. It cost £323 to build.





Ophir lies on the banks of the Manuherikia River, and just outside the town is a small suspension bridge, seemingly in the middle of nowhere. The bridge was constructed between 1879 and 1880; the structure is a characteristic example of Central Otago suspension bridges with schist masonry towers.

Bottom left, Brake is checking the cabling after reading the blue historic plaque. The bridge spans 65 metres and originally cost £7,000 to construct.



After Ophir, we drove less than an hour to our main place of stay over Easter in the township of Clyde.

Clyde is a charming, historic town in New Zealand's Central Otago region, renowned for its 1860s gold rush heritage, schist stone buildings and boutique vineyards. Situated on the Clutha River near the Lake Dunstan, it is a hub for cycling the Otago Central Rail Trail and is overlooked by the massive Clyde Dam.

Clyde grew up around the former settlement of Dunstan during the Otago gold rush of the 1860s. The town could once claim to be the most populous in New Zealand during the height of gold fever. The town's post office (and thus the town) was officially renamed from Dunstan to Clyde on 22 May 1865, after Lord Clyde.

Here Brake is viewing the whole of Clyde from the handy lookout, to the right is the Clutha River, behind this view is the Clyde Dam.



The Clyde Dam was constructed between 1982 and 1993. Filling it was done in four controlled stages beginning in April 1992, and completed the following year, creating Lake Dunstan. The power station has a capacity of four 120 MVA (116 MW) Francis turbines (for a total of 464 MW), but was only allowed to run 432 MW due to resource consent conditions. The dam was built with two additional penstocks, allowing additional turbines to be installed in future. The resource consent was changed in 2005 to allow the full 464 MW to be produced.

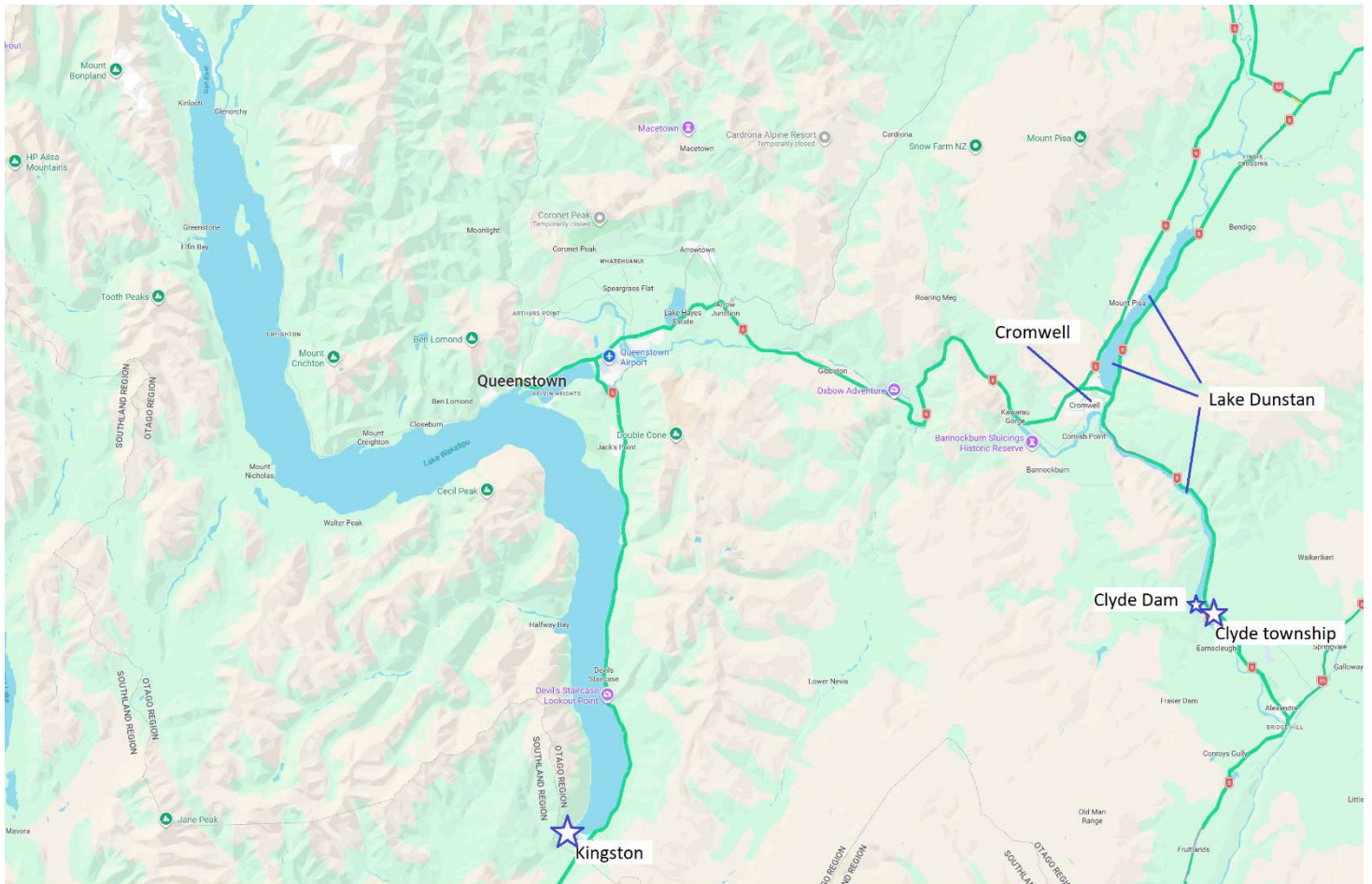


The lake was formed on the Clutha River, and parts of the town of Cromwell were relocated to a new area above the new lake. Between the town of Cromwell and the Clyde Dam, the lake passes through what is called the Cromwell Gorge. The lake covers 26 km², and roughly halfway down its length is the town of Cromwell.

Once again Brake is taking in the views, this time across Lake Dunstan to the southern part of Cromwell, Cromwell still has a small historical district that is roughly in the centre of the photo.



Cromwell is about a 40-minute drive from Queenstown on Lake Wakatipu. At the far end of the lake is Kingston, which has an excellent heritage railway.



The Kingston Flyer is a heritage steam locomotive in the South Island of New Zealand at the southern end of Lake Wakatipu. The heritage railway uses 14 kilometres of preserved track that once formed a part of the Kingston Branch. Originally, Kingston Flyer was a passenger express train between Kingston, Gore, Invercargill, and less frequently, Dunedin. It was operated by the New Zealand Railways from the 1890s to 1957. In 1971, NZR revitalised the service as a tourist venture.

The Kingston Flyer has been operated since 1971 by two AB class steam locomotives:

AB 778 (entered service in 1925)

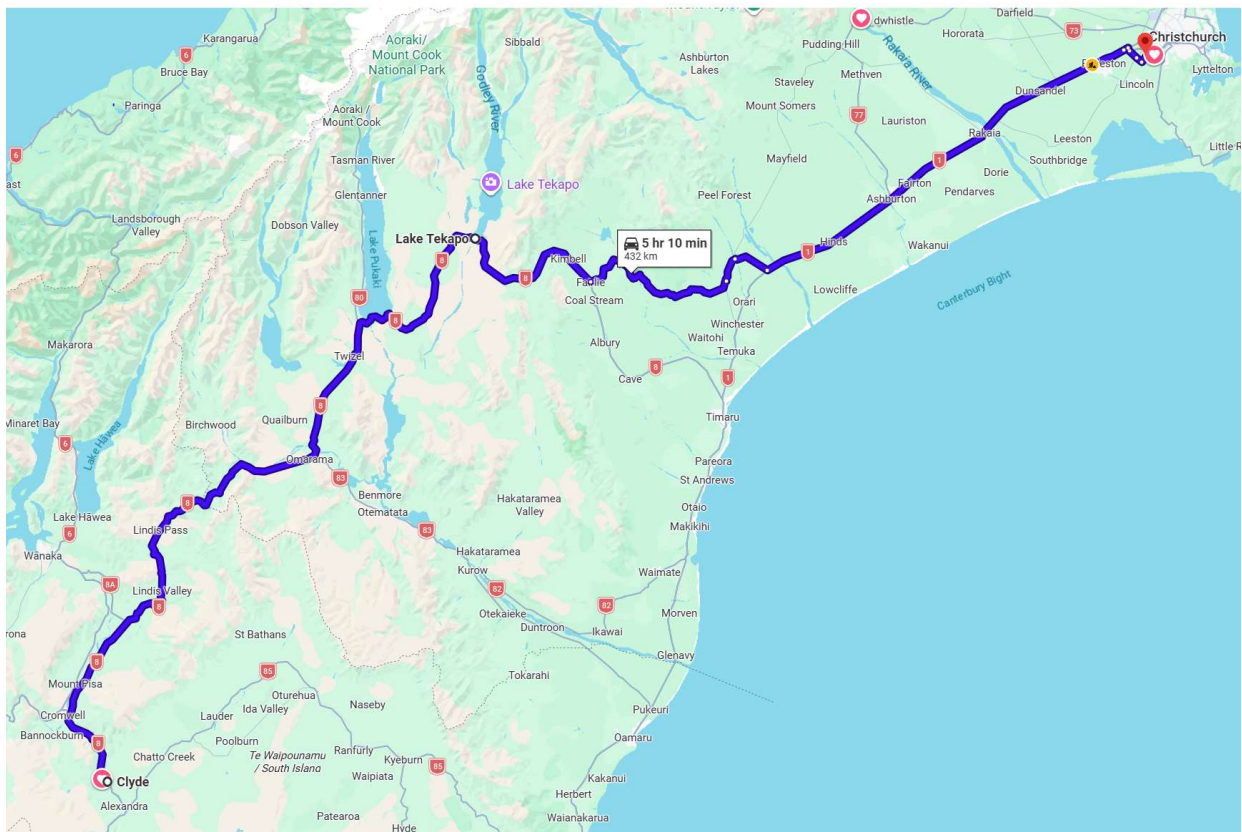
AB 795 (entered service in 1927 and once pulled the New Zealand Royal Train)



As Class A 795 is put in the sidings for the end of the day, Brake watches from nearby, safely on the other side of the fence paying attention and marvelling at the wonderful attention given to all the rolling stock.



After five nights away, we made our way home. This time, we followed the inland route through the mountains called the Southern Alps.



The weather was closing in, so our planned stop at New Zealand's highest mountain, Aoraki / Mount Cook, was bypassed as the mountain was shrouded in cloud. However, when we got to nearby Lake Tekapo the weather was better, and the stillness of the air and the clouds gave an amazing reflection across the lake.

On the shores of the lake sits a tiny church. The Church of the Good Shepherd, on the shores of Lake Tekapo, is a small Anglican church used by various denominations. Built in 1935 as a memorial church to commemorate early settlers, it is one of the most photographed buildings in the country. It has a Category I heritage registration by Heritage New Zealand.

The foundation stone for the church was laid by Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester, on 16 January 1935, in the presence of the bishop of Christchurch, Campbell West-Watson, and Vicar Davies. Walter Davies became the Vicar of Fairlie in February 1933. The Fairlie cure extended up to Mount Cook Village and Davies realised that the Mackenzie Basin needed its own church; he first suggested this to parishioners in September 1933. Davies also suggested that a large window should be incorporated so that there would be a view from within the church of the lake, based on the 1930 design of St James Church at Franz Josef on the West Coast.

Brake spots a lull in the tourist crowds and spends a quiet moment in wonder at the scene.



A different view this time near the sheepdog memorial. The reflections of land and sky across the water of Lake Tekapo give a majestic scene.



The main reason for the visit down south was the Warbirds over Wanaka air show, held biennially over Easter. For security reasons, Brake was left at base camp.



An AI generated image of Breakey McBrakeface.

